

Domestic violence and substance use in the social work curriculum

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"I work within the assessment team, Children and Families. The bulk of our work is domestic violence, this is more often than not either drug or alcohol related, we face challenges every day that we have minimal knowledge of and are ill equipped due to the lack of training in this field."

(Newly Qualified Social Worker)

Introduction

There are high rates of overlap between domestic violence and substance use. The research evidence is particularly strong for women and men seeking help for alcohol or other drug problems, and among perpetrators of domestic abuse. Social workers from all areas of practice are on the front line when supporting individuals and families even though these issues may not always be the presenting problem. Both the research evidence and the experiences of social workers on the front line demonstrate that there is a strong need for teaching on domestic violence and substance use, the nature of the relationship, and the implications for social work practice, in the **core** curriculum. The overlapping nature of these issues, and their subsequent impact on victims' mental and physical health, means that careful assessment and intervention is needed both for the safety and health of the people involved and to ensure appropriate and adequate support for the children living in families where the problems exist. These are emotive and sensitive topics and social workers need to be adequately prepared and to feel confident in doing so safely.

This sheet will be of particular relevance to social work programmes offering specialist pathways for **children and families** social workers, and for those working in community or hospital-based **mental health and adults** teams.

Suggested key areas of teaching

- The links between substance use and domestic abuse, including the impact of particular substances on violent or aggressive behaviour.
- The psychological, emotional and physical impact of substance use and domestic abuse on adults, children, family members and friendships.
- The importance of identifying and responding to domestic abuse and substance use, including how to ask the right questions in the right way.
- The importance of working safely with the perpetrator in an individual or family setting.

Key messages

- Alcohol and drug use does not cause domestic violence and abuse.
- Alcohol and drug use can increase the frequency and severity of domestic abuse.
- Alcohol and drugs are used as a coping mechanism by adult victims (usually women) and adolescent victims.
- Children are at particular risk of harm where both issues are present.
- Adolescents in the care system are more likely to have experienced/witnessed one or both issues at home.
- There are strong links between domestic abuse, substance use and subsequent mental ill health and psychological trauma.
- Children and young people who suffer domestic abuse and parental substance use are more likely to have substance problems and suffer domestic abuse as adults.

(see Galvani 2005)

Involving specialists and agencies

An increasing number of professionals work with the overlapping issues of domestic violence and substance use. Remits include:

- Roles specifically dedicated to working with individuals suffering both substance use and domestic abuse.
- Developmental posts within substance use or domestic violence agencies to help develop policy and practice in light of the high rates of overlap.

There are also a number of agencies who work daily with both issues and who have developed policy and practice based on operational necessity. For example, agencies working directly with children and families affected by substance problems (Family Alcohol Service, Aquarius, Birmingham).

Practitioners are a good resource as guest lecturers and are able to deliver practice-based presentations that demonstrate the complexity of working with both substance use and domestic abuse. Contact the Stella Project (www.gldvp.org.uk and click on the link for the Stella Project) or Alcohol Concern's Embrace Project (www.alcoholconcern.org.uk and enter Embrace under 'search' facility).

Resources available

DVD/films

- *He Drove Me Mad*: a DVD that dramatises and explains mental illness and substance abuse associated with domestic violence. Also contains a CD that contains a PowerPoint presentation and handouts that support the information on the DVD as well as a booklet that provides information about the resource and how to use it in a teaching situation. Ordered via the New Zealand based website www.hedrovememad.com or email debbie.neil@paradise.net.nz
- Loach, K. (Director) (1994) *Ladybird, Ladybird* [Motion picture]. United Kingdom: Channel Four Films. Directed by Ken Loach in 1994 and recently released on DVD. About a woman who suffers violence and abuse from a partner, often after drinking, and the impact it has on her

future relationships and family. Again a powerful and disturbing film that can be used as the basis for discussion in teaching. Available from Amazon.

Websites

- Stella project – currently based in London its objective is to provide positive, sustained improvement in the way services are delivered to domestic abuse survivors, their children and perpetrators of domestic violence affected by problematic substance use. The website has a raft of policy and practice documents to download. Stella project. (2009). Retrieved August, 2009, from www.gldvp.org.uk/C2B/document_tree/ViewACategory.asp?CategoryID=73
- Embrace project – a project run by Alcohol Concern that is working with nine alcohol agencies across the UK to help them develop policy and practice in relation to domestic abuse and working with families. The project's ongoing resource development, eg. newsletters, knowledge sets, are available to download through www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/servlets/projects and click on Embrace.
- Social work, alcohol and drugs website – as well as information on other aspects of drug and alcohol use, this website has a section dedicated to the link with domestic violence and abuse. www.swalcdugs.com/domviolenceintro.htm

Key texts

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- Galvani, S. (2005) 'Grasping the nettle: alcohol and domestic violence'. Retrieved, August, 2009, from Alcohol Concern. www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/servlets/doc/1331
- Galvani, S. (2006) 'Alcohol and domestic violence: women's views'. *Violence against Women*. 12 (7), 641-662.
- Humphreys, C., Regan, L., River, D. and Thiara, R. (2005) 'Domestic violence and substance use: tackling complexity'. *British Journal of Social Work*, (35), 1303-1320.
- Wekerle, C. and Wall, A.M. (eds.) (2002) *The violence and addiction equation: theoretical and clinical issues in substance abuse and relationship violence*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.

Practice guidance

- Stella Project (2007) *Domestic violence, drugs and alcohol: good practice guidelines* (2nd edition) Stella Project toolkit retrieved, August, 2009, from www.gldvp.org.uk/C2B/document_tree/ViewAdocument.asp?ID=77&CatID=154&Search=true
- Cleaver, H., Nicholson, D., Tarr, S. and Cleaver, D. (2006) 'The response of child protection practices and procedures to children exposed to domestic violence or parental substance misuse. Executive summary.' Retrieved August, 2009, from www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/_download/?id=5799
- Galvani, S. (2006) 'Safeguarding children: working with parental alcohol problems and domestic abuse.' One briefing in a series for the Alcohol and Parenting Project, Alcohol Concern. Retrieved, August, 2009, from www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/servlets/doc/1123

Other SWAP resources

SWAP (2009) *Social Work and substance use. teaching the basics*. Retrieved, November 2009 from www.swap.ac.uk/docs/guide_su_learning&teaching.pdf

SWAP (2009). *Learning and teaching digest: integrating substance use teaching into the social work curriculum*. Retrieved, August 2009, from www.swap.ac.uk/docs/digests/swapdigest_7.pdf

SWAP (2009). *Helpsheet: involving alcohol and other drug specialists in social work education*. Retrieved November 2009, from www.swap.ac.uk/docs/helpsheets/hs_substancemis1.pdf

SWAP (2009). *Helpsheet: using substance use research tools to promote teaching and learning*. Retrieved November 2009, from www.swap.ac.uk/docs/helpsheets/hs_su_researchtools.pdf

SWAP(2009). *Information sheet: domestic violence and substance use in the social work curriculum*. Retrieved November, 2009, from www.swap.ac.uk/docs/infosheets/is_domestic_violence.pdf

SWAP (2009). *Information sheet: Key resources for teaching substance use*. Retrieved November. 2009, from www.swap.ac.uk/docs/infosheets/is_keyresources.pdf

SWAP (2009). *Case studies: teaching substance use in social work education*. Retrieved November 2009, from www.swap.ac.uk/docs/casestudies/cs_substancemis2.pdf

SWAP (2010). *Information sheet: Blood Borne Viruses and substance use in the social work curriculum*. Retrieved, January 2010 www.swap.ac.uk/docs/infosheets/is_subusebbv.pdf

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